


Voting and Tech: Creating Apps for Civic Participation

YALI Network members discuss how to create tech tools to support civic participation. 
(U.S. Embassy Ghana)

Providing easy access to credible information for voters seeking to register and vote in elections is a challenge facing democracies all over the world. But in many places, it's difficult to find accurate information, and having the wrong information can lead to voter disenfranchisement, low voter turnout, and even violence.

At a recent meeting of YALI Network members looking to develop tech tools to aid communities during elections, participants sought solutions to what they identified as one of the biggest impediments to voting: knowing when and where to register to vote in upcoming elections. One of the solutions that held the most promise was the development of an app that employed crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing is the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas or content by soliciting contributions from many people, especially online. When developing apps that are based on crowdsourced material, developers collect social media posts from Twitter or Facebook, SMS or text messaging services like WhatsApp, and interactive voice response systems (IVR). The feedback collected is paired with a particular question. Then, using location data, developers collate messages on the topic of voting locations, for example, to form an interactive map.

With this map, potential voters can get information not only on where they should register, but also on what types of identification are needed and what location is closest or correct for them.

As part of the process for designing and creating an app that clarifies the registration and voting process, developers should also plan on the following:

1. Create a platform for outreach to bring awareness of the app using social media or traditional media like radio, television or newspapers. The app is no good if people aren't aware of it or don't know how to provide the data that will populate the map.
2. Try a crowdsourcing platform such as Ushahidi (www.ushahidi.com) or Ona (ona.io) to build your submission form and map or display for the data.
3. Collect data on the specific needs or requests of the community. Create hashtags and keywords to designate activities and locations. This will allow for common messages that can be easily categorized.
4. Be sure you have determined your verification parameters. You should have a collection of enough people saying the same thing before publishing or confirming that information. You will want to make sure that your data isn't out of sync with the area where you're collecting it, based on a percentage of the population. As a bonus, clusters of data can be accessed for additional information from those posting or texting.

Aggregating information from several different sources — including neighbors and community members — through crowdsourcing can provide a level of confidence to those who may hesitate to

participate in the elections process. Having information readily available and easily accessible can be one of the best ways to convince voters to participate in their democracy.

Check out these articles for more information on crowdsourcing: "[Can you make a map to guide Ebola health workers?](#)" from ShareAmerica and "[Reinventing Society Through Entrepreneurship](#)" from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network.
